

MAMA D'S 2 BLOCKS: A DOCUMENTARY FILM

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Mama D's 2 Blocks tells the story of a neighborhood home in New Orleans that was transformed into a distribution center and used to assist residents impacted by Hurricane Katrina's devastation in 2005. Mama D stayed at her home throughout the storm and remained there until the floodwaters had subsided. After the water had drained, socially minded youth from all over the country were drawn to Mama D's home and stayed there while supporting local renewal efforts. The film documents their joining together, without electricity or running water, and assisting in the rebuilding process undertaken by Mama D and other neighborhood residents. This film captures a community in action, how it survived, and the first steps taken towards the rebuilding of New Orleans.

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PROSPECTUS

Mama D's 2 Blocks tells the story of a neighborhood home in New Orleans that was transformed into a resource distribution center and used to assist residents impacted by Hurricane Katrina's devastation in 2005. Driving along the streets of New Orleans we see huge piles of debris, boats on tops of houses, and watermarks on the side of every building. Slow motion footage from inside a Coast Guard helicopter rescue unit vividly portrays the fear of men and women being hoisted from their rooftops. Then the sound of an unknown female voice is heard. The rhythm of her speech pattern almost sounds as if she is reciting a poem. The voice is that of Dyane French who is known to the community as Mama D. Mama D tells of the horrors she experienced during the storm and goes on to relate how she did not depend on the government for assistance. She recounts how, both during the storm and immediately afterwards, she began to compile resources on her own, and with the help of an army of volunteers, set about to reconstruct her neighborhood.

New Orleans is divided into a number of 'wards' that map out different sections of New Orleans and are used locally to unite a community's loyalty. Mama D's residence is located in the seventh ward section of New Orleans. Footage was obtained at her home and the surrounding neighborhood, or ward, referred to as the '7th'. The central location of *Mama D's 2 Blocks* is the home, turned community center, of Mama D. Mama D stayed at this location throughout the storm and remained there until the floodwaters had subsided. After the water was drained, socially minded youth from all over the country were

drawn to Mama D's home and stayed there while supporting local renewal efforts. The film documents their joining together, without electricity or running water, and assisting in the rebuilding process undertaken by Mama D and other neighborhood residents.

Residents living on the same block tell of the aid they received from Mama D and her volunteers, which included hot meals, a blue tarped roof to protect their homes from rain and assistance gutting their destroyed homes. The residents describe their belief that they were abandoned by the federal government and later go on to convey the horrors of both the storm and their evacuation. This film attempts to show a community in action, how it survived, and the first steps taken towards the rebuilding of New Orleans. By capturing the actual immediate recollections of those affected, the film also serves as a historical record of the dire conditions faced by this community and all residents of Gulf Coast.

Mama D has long been an activist in the New Orleans African-American community, and her actions during the storm brought her into the national spotlight. Serving as a recent witness during congressional hearings discussing the evacuee experience, she spoke toward the notion that race played a role in the botched evacuation and subsequent inadequate reconstruction efforts. She remains a voice for the African-American community and the hearing was featured on almost every major news outlet including CNN and MSNBC. Brief portions of footage, showing her participation in the hearing, are featured, along with her on camera discussions about race, in an effort to communicate to the

audience her suspicion that racial injustice played a role in the government's response to Katrina.

Throughout *Mama D's 2 Blocks*, both observational footage and first-hand recollections of the struggles that Mama D, neighborhood residents and volunteer workers went through, are portrayed. Periodically, the subjects' words are presented in an experimental style built around a modality that incorporates fast-paced, rhythmic editing. Lyrical components including aural montages and visual montages are also used in an effort to re-create the sense of disarray that is often referenced by the interviewees. Specifically, slow dark music will be a major element in providing an ominous undercurrent to the film that is representative of both the hardships and the hopefulness expressed by the participants. Images of the actual storm, and the damage caused, accompany the subject's description in order to paint a picture of the events in the mind of the viewer. The film incorporates relevant governmental still images and archival footage from media outlets which covered the storm. This footage is used both as supportive visual evidence and in the structuring of visual montages.

At the film's conclusion the current state of affairs in Mama D's neighborhood is concisely discussed. Mama D reflects on the events surrounding Katrina and how her actions aided the community. She discusses the people who have returned and the hardships involved with the ongoing renewal process. She also focuses on the lingering impact of the flooding and the remaining obstacles that are still faced by many unable to return. The final portion of the film provides the audience a final reflection on both the progress

that has been made in the area and the difficulties and complications that remain in the minds of those who experienced the tragedies of Katrina.

PRE-PRODUCTION RESEARCH

Subject Matter Research

Information about the efforts of Mama D and area volunteers was first made available through personal contacts residing in New Orleans. Local resident Danny Lennon had been engaged in supplying Mama D's center with basic necessities including various food items and water. After he witnessed the events he contacted me to inform me of the situation and encouraged me to document the state of affairs. Direct contact with Mama D was not attainable because she was not in possession of a working phone. Therefore, I approached James Henderson, a local political activist and a supporter of Mama D's efforts, who acted as a liaison. He contacted Mama D on the behalf of this production, with the request for permission to allow a small production crew to come to her location and gather video documentation of the events taking place and to speak on-camera with various participants. Mama D agreed and we immediately initiated a plan to travel from Texas to Louisiana for production.

Once on site further subject matter research was conducted by direct engagement with the individuals involved. Although only a short amount of time was allotted for this process, the importance of creating a historical record of the actions of Mama D and the volunteers became immediately clear. Being a native New Orleanian assisted in rapidly establishing an inherent level of trust with Mama D. In an environment where there were more outsiders than locals, due to the displacement of residents, it was a benefit to be able to communicate with an inside perspective on the nature of events and the significance of retaining New

Orleans culture. Alan Rosenthal crystallizes the importance of this kind of trust stating, “it has always seemed to me that documentary directing is more about trust than about finding the right camera positions” (145). With Mama D’s approval, backed by her evident matriarchal authority, we had no difficulty speaking with anyone else encountered.

People, Location Research

Once in the surrounding neighborhood of Mama D’s project we approached residents who were actively involved with cleaning and re-building homes. After surveying the area’s endemic damage, the production crew was able to speak at length with multiple residents about their personal ordeals in dealing with the storm and their present state of affairs in terms of residency options and home rebuilding prospects. A pattern rapidly emerged whereby after speaking with one person we would quickly be directed, by the current interviewee, to another person whose story was perceived as important and relevant to the topic of discussion.

Key characters, besides Mama D, featured in the film include Mr. Brown, an elderly man who remained in his house for several days during the flooding and then was evacuated to a series of different locations and Mr. Davis, a retired military man and neighbor of Mama D, who stayed for a portion of the flooding and then finally evacuated by boat. Once people returned, Mama D and her small army of volunteers, referred to by her as “free people”, because they are exercising their individual rights and not beholden to the government’s bureaucracy, helped patch up roofs and begin the cleaning process. The film

highlights volunteers working in homes, clearing debris and bonding together around a make shift campfire at the end of the day. We hear from several volunteers including John, a young man from California, who dropped everything he was doing and traveled down to support the people of New Orleans any way he could. The final subject is Lyn, a local neighbor, who captures the essence of the growing anger among residents and ominously predicts that, for New Orleans to make a full recovery, it will take ten or more years.

Funding

Potential funding sources for this project were centered on institutions and private companies whose major focus of interest is the South and Louisiana. Entities that sponsor student productions were also a potential source of grant funding for this project due to the student authorship. Some organizations with a funding interest in line with the subject matter, or production sources, of *Mama D's 2 Blocks* include the following: Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, Louisiana Division of the Arts, Arts Council of New Orleans, New Orleans PBS Affiliate WYES, and the University Film and Video Association's Carole Fielding Student Grant Program. After further research a decision was made to approach New Orleans PBS Affiliate WYES once a final version of the film was completed for a potential station broadcast. Organizations supporting the arts in New Orleans area and Louisiana were inundated with projects concerning Katrina and the timeline for their funding process was too lengthy to support the purposes of this project. Ultimately, the Carole Fielding Student Grant Program proved to be the most attainable possibility and an application was prepared and submitted in

December of 2006. After being reviewed by the Carole Fielding Student Grant Program decision committee, it was determined that they would not be able to fund this project.

The bulk of the production and post-production monetary requirements were provided in-kind through participation with the University of North Texas. Camera, audio and editing equipment were all supplied as part of the Master of Fine Arts program. In addition, all production personnel donated their time as part of the program. As such, the feasibility of the documentary was assured given that the actual financial requirements would be limited. The majority of the concrete funding for this project was ultimately completed through self-financing.

Distribution

Following the completion of the film there will be a major multi-tiered festival push for *Mama D's 2 Blocks*. The festival strategy involves targeting festivals located in the Southern Region, festivals whose area of focus include positive community endeavors, African-American related subject matter and affirmative human-interest topics. Festivals in the South, and especially along the Gulf Coast, share an awareness of the governmental response to the devastation caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita which should translate into a positive reception for *Mama D's 2 Blocks*. Finally, the film will be entered into festivals supportive of material produced by student filmmakers.

Further distribution efforts will take place by reaching out to regional public broadcasting outlets in the Southeast for potential television broadcast. A broader request to all Southern PBS outlets would follow a local New Orleans

PBS affiliate, WYES screening of *Mama D's 2 Blocks*. WYES will then be approached to with the request to become a representative sponsor assisting in reaching out to PBS outlets on a national level. Additional potential screening opportunities include the PBS series', P.O.V., Wide Angle and Independent Lens.

Self-distribution will also be a viable method that would entail approaching educational markets, media libraries and community service organizations. The major source for potential institutional purchases involves the rapidly broadening educational media markets. College and university entities are a strong supporter of independent and documentary material similar to *Mama D's 2 Blocks* and academic media libraries have become a vast market across the country.

Audience

People of all ages living in the New Orleans area and the Gulf Region who were impacted by the storm, as well as displaced residents who are not yet able to return, will make up the main audience for *Mama D's 2 Blocks*. There will also be major crossover appeal into a more mainstream audience due to the significant amount of interest in the devastation caused by Katrina and the larger issues of governmental failure at local, state and national levels. The film is able to connect with this audience because it shares the predominant New Orleans point of view that there has been a lack of adequate resources and support during the aftermath of the storm and during the renewal process.

Mama D's 2 Blocks engages an audience due to the interviewee's honest portrayal. The taped conversations were done so soon after the events took

place that the information still appears to be fresh in their minds. The film creates connections with anyone who was directly impacted by Katrina, as well as those who viewed the events in real time on the news. The film's sole focus on a specific neighborhood allows the audience to become personally invested in the characters and the unfolding events within the 7th Ward.

Goals of the Production

Due to the high volume of productions dealing with Katrina's impact, it was a major goal of this production to provide a more micro-level point of view. More than any other film, Spike Lee's four-hour documentary epic *When the Levees Broke* sufficiently tells the story of what happened to New Orleans after Katrina and the flooding (See discussion on page 31). The goal of *Mama D's 2 Blocks* is to present a targeted community perspective. The film takes a restricted look at one situation, and by highlighting the neighborhood's positive reaction in the wake of disaster, their story becomes a representation of the strength and courage that remains instilled in residents throughout the New Orleans area.

This film aspires to use the documentary form as a tool used to enlighten the public about the true nature of events. Bill Nichols states how the process of a documentary can inform the public in that "[w]e need understanding, with its requirements of empathy and insight, to grasp the implications and consequences of what we do" (165). Within *Mama D's 2 Blocks* the 'we' should be interpreted as referencing the public affected by the United States governmental response. This production empowers the audience to reflect on

how the response could have been better and what can be done in preparation for a future disaster.

Another goal of *Mama D's 2 Blocks* is not to overshadow the horrendous nature of the Katrina experience and become included in the collective group of “overromantized stories about a few brave and rugged individuals [that] may create false impressions for the general public about the true meaning of disaster” (Kaniasty and Norris, 30). While the media devoted a huge portion of time to Katrina’s impact, some minor details were certainly overblown, but the expansive coverage itself was not typical of the contention that “[m]edia tend to amplify the impact of the event, as this tactic is in their interest: The bigger the destruction, of course, the bigger the news” (Eynde and Veno, 170). Another critic admonishes the media calling the reporting “a megaphone for hysteria and blame” (Olasky, 21). *Mama D's 2 Blocks* is an attempt to present a balance between recapturing a section of the Katrina experience and not adding to the promulgation of myth and overreaching hysterics.

A final objective of *Mama D's 2 Blocks* is to serve as an advocate for those involved by presenting their hardships to a larger audience. The film acts as a recreation of the confusion felt by participants in the flooded areas. In this attempt to grasp the confusion and make sense of the chaos it becomes apparent that “[t]he fog of disaster is as dense as the fog of war” (Olasky, 13) and through discussion created in this film, those not directly involved gain a comprehension of the true physical and psychological impact of the disaster.

RECONCEPTUALIZATION BEFORE PRODUCTION

Before principle shooting began, this documentary was conceived as being a historical archive, capturing the story of a community based resource center serving its neighborhood residents. However, when first speaking on-location with the participants the goals of the production evolved. It became clear that there was an aura of confusion and trauma among those returning home and also among those carrying out the aid process. The interviewee's disjointed recollections were a clear indicator that their state of mind also needed to be a major focus of the production. With this new goal, the film was re-visioned as a work that would incorporate poetic elements and non-traditional editing, built around the use of jump cuts, or non-sequential edits, and montage, that incorporated the randomness of thought spoken by the interviewees in order to also portray the mindset of Mama D and others directly involved in the recovery efforts.

INTEGRATION OF THEORY AND PRODUCTION

Theories and Rationales for Use

This film is designed to specifically communicate the experiences of Mama D and her neighbors to the viewer. The film does not attempt to tell the entire truth of the Katrina experience. The ability of the documentary form itself “cannot reveal the truth of events, but only the ideologies and consciousness that construct competing truths...” (Williams, *Mirrors*, 385). Mama D’s, and the surrounding residents of the 7th ward’s, version of the truth that occurred during the flooding of New Orleans is put forth in this film, but it is left up to the audience to decide as to the veracity of what is presented.

To tell the interviewee’s stories the overall structure of the film utilizes a combination of four of documentary scholar Bill Nichols’ six modes of documentary representation. Because no single pure form was best capable of being used to tell the story of Mama D and her neighbors, a mixture of forms became evident as the most effective approach for *Mama D’s 2 Blocks* because of the need to represent a range of experiences and emotions described by the subjects. The film is able to use a combination of methodologies in order to match the different personalities featured. The end result is a multi-layered documentary employing a range of stylistic devices all unified by direct discussions with the participants in their environment.

The film is largely comprised of sit-down interviews and observational video material of the subjects interacting in their respective environments. A major part of *Mama D’s 2 Blocks* involves the filmmaker-subject interviews that

Nichols would place into what he calls the participatory mode. In general I have trouble with Nichols' contention that the filmmaker-subject interview is equal in the level of participation to that of the filmmaker being physically included in the film itself. He states that "participatory documentaries stress the ongoing, open-ended experience of the filmmaker or the interaction between filmmaker and subject [and] the active engagement of the filmmaker" (121-3). Nichols talks about these as separate "components" and discusses the separation of the two, but lumps filmmaker interaction with the filmmaker-subject interview in the larger mode simply stated as participatory (121-3). I feel that Nichols' argument could be clarified by dividing the participatory mode into direct participatory and indirect participatory. Direct participatory would include the use of self-reflexive elements such as filmmaker participation, or the onscreen inclusion of the filmmaking apparatus. The filmmaker-subject interview, presented on-screen as a first person experience, would then be better labeled as indirect participatory. This is the subcategory that was implemented throughout *Mama D's 2 Blocks* and is effective in allowing the participant's voice to dominate the message of the film.

Closely related to the participatory mode is Nichols' performative mode and its' inherent subjective nature. Here again the utilization of this mode of representation cannot be completely ruled out, but certain components as described by Nichols are not entirely suited to the structure of *Mama D's 2 Blocks* where the subject's perspective (not the filmmaker's) is to have the dominant emphasis. The performative mode's goal of "stress[ing] the emotional complexity of experience from the perspective of the filmmaker him-or herself"

was avoided because of this film's intent to allow the subject's perspective to guide the story (Nichols, 131). Again, the filmmaker is not part of this film and thus there is a consistent effort to distance the film from the "autobiographical" nature of the performative mode and the "diaristic" elements found in the participatory mode (131). What was taken from the performative mode is what is defined as "remind[ing] us that the world is more than the sum of the visible evidence we derive from it" (134). The actual accompanying visual elements seen in the film allow a picture to emerge of the actual conditions faced by those involved. The visceral elements of the performative mode, that ask the audience to focus on the larger societal implications, are inherently an element of *Mama D's 2 Blocks*.

The mode most used for the bulk of the evidentiary footage shot for *Mama D's 2 Blocks* was undertaken in a style that Nichols has labeled observational. Nichols describes the observational mode of representation as "observing lived experience spontaneously" (110). The video footage used throughout the film to support the interviews was obtained without filmmaker interference and includes capturing the subjects engaged in various activities including handing out materials to returning residents, preparing meals for neighbors and volunteers, surveying damage to homes, etc. The principles of the observational mode were adhered to in correlation with the goals of the film to present the experience of the residents rather than the process of filmmaking.

The events that transpired during and after Hurricane Katrina were so unimaginable and surreal that in some instances the footage needed to be edited

together in a more complex manner than a pure observational mode allows. A subjective approach was then the best method to employ, allowing the audience to appreciate how the participants of the film felt. In order for the film to possess an experiential quality the observational footage was, at times, manipulated and pieced together in non-conventional ways that attempted to re-create the surrealistic nature of the events that took place. Nichols places this type of manipulation into the poetic mode that “stresses mood, tone and affect much more than displays of knowledge...” (103). Slow motion, accelerated action, non-sequential edits, aural montage and visual montage are the key post-production techniques used in this effort. Slow motion provides the audience with the ability to be impacted by what is seen on-screen for longer than normal generating a hyper-real sense of the events. Accelerated footage is more engaging because the audience must contemplate what is rapidly appearing on-screen. Aural and video collages allow the diverse and incredible experiences described to be woven together to produce a sense of the uncertainty towards the events experienced by the participants. Jump cuts mimicked the random thoughts described by the participants and are defined as a “[t]ransitional device in which two similar images taken at different times are cut together so that the elision of intervening time is apparent” (Rabiger, 587).

The film also attempts to resist Nichols’ two remaining categories of expository and reflexive. What is referred to as the expository mode by Nichols can be seen as a heavy-handed approach utilized to directly address the audience with an argument or contention (105). In an effort to allow the subjects

to present their own viewpoints, the expository mode, and the most common device of the expository mode, voice over narration, was not used (105).

Furthermore, to allow the viewer to concentrate on the events taking place in the film, *Mama D's 2 Blocks* also avoids the complex issues of the reflexive mode which can redirect the audience towards questions about the filmmaking process and “draw [...] our attention to our assumptions and expectations about documentary form itself” (128). Within the contents of *Mama D's 2 Blocks* the physical tools of the filmmaking process remain absent, enabling the audience to focus on the presentation of the described events and not the process through which the film was created. The final film is a hybrid work containing formal sit-down interviews punctuated with moments of non-conventional imagery and audio, all unified thematically by a shared subjective reaction to the trauma resulting from Katrina and the flooding.

Approaches

One approach taken during production was to enter the situation without any previous on-location site research. While not ideal in all circumstances, this is similar to the filmmaking methods taken by “direct cinema” directors who, “insist on going in cold. They work with a minimum of equipment, use natural light, and feel that any scouting visit will contaminate the situation for filming” (Hampe, 143). Knowing only of the dramatic nature of Mama D's situation, the filmmakers were allowed to enter the location and immediately gather observational footage of events perceived as relevant and important to tell the

story. This was a challenging process as decisions had to be made without hesitation or lengthy consideration.

The production was also completed assuming that the final version would not contain any narration by an outside non-participant's voice over. With this in mind, the interviewees were asked to always incorporate the questions into their answer so that the audience would be oriented to the overall topic of discussion without a prompt from the film. The filmmakers shared the view that voiceover narration can "force us into passivity because they insist that we either accept authority or tune out" (Rabiger, 444). The final film empowers the individuals involved by allowing their own voice to be highlighted in a forum for their own views.

Reviews of Additional Texts Reviewed for Research

Research allows a greater focus on the historical context of the events that took place in New Orleans. First an effort must be made to define the major components relevant to a disaster in the context of Katrina. For the purposes of this film a disaster is best defined using author R. Bolin's interpretation of a disaster as "a crisis event in which the demands being placed on a human system by the event exceed the systems capacity to respond" (italics removed; 61 and Eynde and Veno, 168). Using this definition it can be shown that the events of Katrina and its aftermath were really a series of disasters including the initial storm, the subsequent flooding, the evacuee's escape, the resident's displacement and finally, the inability to efficiently rebuild or return home. Disaster researchers Eynde and Veno further point out that the cause of a

disaster can be categorized into two subcategories. The first classification is that of “natural disasters” caused by “forces of nature” such as an earthquake.

Secondly, a disaster can be labeled as “human induced disasters” when caused by “acts of omission” whereby “events [...] are caused by poor planning [...] and by negligence”, such as the improperly designed levee system (176, and Berren et al. 1989). When looked upon even further blame is not always absolute because a disaster may be caused by a mix of both improper technological forces and forces of nature (176).

Eynde and Veno clarify the ambiguous nature of disaster blame by stating that “[c]lassification and categorization becomes increasingly tenuous with the recognition that disasters are caused by dynamic interacting factors that may then interact with a series of environmental factors” (176-7). Ignoring the inadequate governmental response for a moment, during Katrina there were multiple factors responsible for the flooding with the two most notable being the high water from the storm’s surge, and the improperly designed levees. Further confusion is created depending upon one’s belief as to how the levees became dysfunctional. If the breach was in fact destroyed on purpose then the act would be considered classified under “acts of commission” whereby the events are “purposeful” rather than being inadvertently negligible under the previously discussed “acts of omission” (176, and Berren et al. 1989).

There is also a great deal of research material available in relation to the general pattern of community response in reaction to a disaster that was relevant in structuring this film. Authors Krzysztof Kaniasty and Fran Norris note that

while each disaster is unique, the response to the disaster can be viewed in a similar manner to that of “observing unending fractals, the closer we look, the more detail emerges—and the more a reliable pattern emerges as well” (25). The research suggests that the actions of Mama D and the community are part of a typical pattern of disaster response. Through capturing the stories from multiple neighborhood residents included in the film the “individual reactions become shared reactions and define the collective identity of a coping community” (26).

By chronicling both the individual stories and Mama D’s collective efforts at the neighborhood level, a representation of the entire community response to a natural disaster emerges. In order to simulate the research it was imperative for the film to express Mama D’s communal efforts as natural because they are in fact characteristic of the usual pattern of action that emerges in a disaster response. Kaniasty and Norris encapsulate the nature of the typical response, and the response seen in the film, saying that “[c]ontrary to common beliefs about mass panic and chaotic disorganization, victims of most disasters quickly tend to regain a collective sense of determination and rapidly immerse themselves in the process of aiding one another” (28-9).

Other research also demonstrates that Mama D’s efforts were similar with what is understood to take place in communities reacting to a disaster. Wenger and Parr project that:

The consequence of a disaster event on a locality is in the direction of the creation of community, not its disorganization, because during the emergency period there emerges a consensus of opinion on the priority of values within a community; there develops a set of norms which encourage and reinforce community members to act in an altruistic

fashion; also, disaster minimizes conflict which may divide the community prior to the disaster event (8).

This certainly can be seen to be congruent with the organizational process witnessed during the completion of this documentary. While the larger city, state and national governmental resources failed to form any cohesive plan for support, within Mama D's microcosm of the city, rebuilding was undertaken immediately. Mama D was also a major resource to her neighborhood by providing what are considered to be the major "needs" in a disaster area including "the procurement and distribution of food", a mechanism to "collect and distribute clothing", and to provide "some type of shelter...to those community members who are left homeless after a disaster impact" (92-96).

Judith Golec, in a 1976 case study on the response following the Teton Dam collapse in Idaho, writes about a local aid response that echoes the calls by Mama D some 30 years later. In what appears to be an insufficient repetitive disaster response made by the government, local officials told the public "[r]oll up your sleeves and get your homes and communities cleaned up. Don't sit back and wait for the federal government to do it for you. Let's do it ourselves" (Golec, 238 and Kaniasty and Norris, 37). This demonstrates the unfortunate history of failed relief efforts and legitimizes Mama D's criticism to the governmental response in New Orleans.

Eynde and Veno discuss how members of a community form grass roots efforts in response to a crisis in a parallel manner to Mama D and also reflect on the psychological implications (182-190). Their conclusions, based on a case study in Banksia, is congruent with Mama D's efforts in that "[t]he grass-roots

community has driven its own rehabilitation program and maintained ownership of this process with minimal intervention from community psychologists or other outside experts” (189). Mama D “revolted” against the governmentally sanctioned relief organizations and was “empowered” in doing so, leading “to a sense of power and control, thus increasing any group member’s sense of personal efficacy and reducing stress for members of the empowered groups” (189). It is evident that Mama D’s work has a correlation with the psychological recovery needs of her neighbors as well as her own.

One area of concern was that Mama D and other neighbors were not confronting their own psychological recovery. Kaniasty and Norris pinpoint this potential danger saying “[o]ver involvement in collective action may restrain some victims from resolving their own personal problems” (29). Indeed Mama D did have a distraught appearance during the production and was greatly improved a year later as witnessed during the final shoot, although still visibly distraught. One possible explanation as to how Mama D was able to cope involves the physical process of her helping others as a mechanism allowing the creation of empowerment that tempered feelings of victimization. The acts of assistance can be seen to counteract “psychological distress”, so that ultimately “perceived support mediated the long-term effects of psychological distress...” (Kaniasty and Norris, 53). *Mama D’s 2 Blocks* attempts to both capture the experiences of the neighborhood, and to reflect on the current mental state of those involved. Author Davit Troutt reflects that for the survivors of Katrina “the disorientation about an unfathomable future may be as crippling as the heartache of a lost past”

(4-5). Because disorientation is shown to be a key symptom among disaster victims, the film is designed around an attempt to recreate the disoriented state witnessed in the participants.

There has also been research explaining the rationale behind volunteers coming to the aid of unknown victims. Mama D's young 'workers' who came from all across the country are referred to, by scholars, as "helpful strangers" who serve the vital role of initiating recovery while the victims may be stunted by psychological trauma (Kaniasty and Norris, 34). The effort of Mama D's volunteers is also supported and explained in research that finds a variety of conditions that instill "altruistic norms" as a response to a disaster whereby "the conditions are created in which community members feel they should help and also creates the conditions in which they do help" (Wenger and Parr, 12). This was evident in national charitable support, but is also clearly visible in this film where people were drawn to Mama D's actions, physically traveling to the location and providing hands-on assistance.

What was remarkable about the men and women who volunteered with Mama D was that they circumvented the established mechanisms of volunteerism within sanctioned organizations such as the Salvation Army and the Red Cross. The main volunteer interviewed explains that he attempted to go through the Red Cross, but encountered a bureaucracy that would not utilize his efforts immediately while he clearly saw the need for urgent aid. So he took matters in to his own hands and found Mama D's organization. This process mirrors Mama D's assertions that normal vehicles of aid were slow and mired in

bureaucratic red tape, but that her own assistance organization could respond more rapidly. Kaniasty and Norris also state that volunteer efforts are typically coordinated by locals who bridge the gap between the local victims and the “outsiders” acting as “an intermediary for the outsiders’ generosity” (36-7). What is then interesting is the potential danger in this process; only doing things the local way can create “a risk of surrendering to unjust and discriminating rules for distribution of resources, sanctioned by local traditions” (37). This was partially witnessed during production as Mama D had decided to offer assistance first to the handicapped and elderly, then uniformly to the rest of the neighborhood residents.

The interviewee’s remembrances of remaining in New Orleans during the flooding are supported by the recollections of one reporter on the ground who shares that:

The stragglers and holdouts remain in New Orleans...Sleeping on porches, guarded by their dogs in houses with no ceiling fans...But no one has the heart to take from these survivors the only thing they have left: the dignity of remaining in their home...The locals know that if they leave, something will disappear with the leaving, and it will never come back (Reagan, 143).

This personal memory of the conditions on the ground correlates with statements by the participants of *Mama D’s 2 Blocks* when they discuss why they did or did not leave. Several times Mama D insists that people don’t leave for hurricanes and what made this situation unique was the levee breach.

The contention that the levees were in fact destroyed on purpose can be seen as part of the promulgation of rumor often seen in a disaster response. Kaniasty and Norris state that “[w]hen outcomes are uncertain, rumors often

thrive. Unfortunately these rumors are primarily negative and extreme” (44).

Mama D’s belief that the levee’s were bombed can also be explained in terms of historical context by the following:

And in one final insult to the dignity of those trapped in the floodwaters, a persistent rumor that the levees were breached on purpose. While this so called “urban myth” has no basis in fact, there is a historical basis. During the Great Mississippi Flood in 1927, wealthy city fathers in New Orleans persuaded the federal officials to dynamite the main Caernarvon, La., levee in order to flood the mostly poor, rural southern parishes, in order to protect their own business interests. The river rushed through St. Bernard and Plaquemines parishes at the rate of 250,000 cubic feet per second. The water did not recede until July, six months later. Although the residents of those parishes had been promised restitution for the loss of their homes, none ever materialized.

In 1965, many who had lived through the late ‘20s in the region were still alive. And when Hurricane Betsy came ashore, residents of the still-poor parishes were convinced that once again, the levees were purposely breached to save the rich, white neighborhoods from destruction-and sacrifice the lower Ninth Ward in the process. Although no proof ever existed that this occurred, many in the Ninth Ward to this day believe that then, Mayor Hugo Schiro ordered the levees to be blown up in order to protect his own Lakeview neighborhood.

Katrina’s threatening winds and rains evoked memories of both 1927 and 1965... (Reagan, 152-3).

Whether viewed as factual or not, Mama D’s statements are part of the forceful belief that certain actions were racially motivated. Stein and Preuss observe that “Mamma D’s story of the levee bombings are among the stories circulating that lend credence to the growing belief that racism and a lack of concern for victims in poorer sections of the Crescent City influenced the government’s reaction to the hurricane’s victims” (39). And finally, there remains validity to the argument of Mama D within the context of her personal experience because “[w]hile some reminiscences might not be factually accurate, they are accurate in the psyche of the interviewee” (50).

At the conclusion of the film a reflection on the time passed is featured. After a year has passed the volunteer efforts have diminished and recovery efforts stagnate. This is emblematic in that “[a]s time passes, the heightened community solidarity, fellowship, and helping must inevitably cease” (Kaniasty and Norris, 40). When the film encounters Mama D, one year after the first visit, there is a visual reduction in the volunteer level and Mama D asserts that many in the neighborhood have returned, but the conditions remain dire. She goes on to say there is still an abundance of work to be done, but there is now more a sense of grieving the dead and trying to settle into some kind of normalcy.

Documentary Films

In order to gain a greater perspective as to how the goals of *Mama D's 2 Blocks* have been realized by other directors, several other films dealing with the impact of Hurricane Katrina were viewed. Films by directors who employed experimental or poetical stylistic devices were also researched to evaluate how the style has been effectively used in the past. Films that contain subjective segments, but are largely traditional in nature were specifically sought out. The films of Errol Morris were essential in this process because they possess a hybrid quality in terms of being structured with traditional interviews mixed together with surreal or experimental stylistic devices including slow-motion, accelerated footage, canted angles and the inclusion of different media formats.

A major part of Morris' unique style of documentary filmmaking is the surrealistic approach he takes in his films. The aspect of visualizing what people are thinking, as well as his use of surrealistic imagery and editing techniques, is

the application utilized by Morris which allows his films to fall under the category of 'surreal'. Another relevant aspect of the surrealist film is that it should be "concerned with depicting the workings of the subconscious..." (Hayward 370), and Morris's work attempts to go deep into the mind of its characters. Morris is able to visualize onscreen, not just what his subjects are referring to, but how their thought processes work and what they actually see in their minds. Morris has been very clear that his filmmaking style has surrealistic roots by saying, "I've been influenced by lots of filmmakers, by surrealism, by Bunuel..." (Ryan).

In the film *The Thin Blue Line* Morris provides the viewer with different versions of a police officer's murder. He shows reenactments of the action according to how each witness remembers the event without any judgment as to the validity of their memory. The reenactments include hard colored lighting which have a dreamlike quality, or perhaps the quality of a memory and appear "studied, often, slow-motion, and highly expressionistic [...] to the tune of Philip Glass's hypnotic score" (Williams, "The New Documentary" 12). The audience, by seeing exactly what each character believes they remember, struggles with the contrasting versions, just as the characters seem to struggle with their subconscious and with what they remember themselves.

Another example of representing the sub-conscious can be seen in the visual style of *Fast, Cheap and Out of Control*. In this film, which deals with the careers of four different 'obsessed' individuals, "the director goes ballistic with the barrage of image and texture that suit the multivalent layering of obsession that drives the film" (Chang 71). Morris uses different film stocks, different film

speeds, severely canted camera angles, and rapid editing in an effort to visualize what is going on in the minds of each individual.

An additional “Morris approach” that is emulated in *Mama D’s 2 Blocks* is the expressionistic technique of taking the viewer to an unexpected place and forcing the viewer’s idea of what is normal to be destroyed. Often Morris inter-cuts one character’s situation over another’s audio. The image may be of an elephant spinning in accelerated film time, but the audio is of Rodney Brooks, an interviewee, philosophizing on the “evolutionary mode” of developing robots. With this technique “Morris uses the documentary form to examine the ways in which each of us sees the world, to present a composite reality where perception is an amalgam of points of view” (Lack 21). The link between what the characters are referencing and the visual imagery ignores any common practices of direct correlation. Morris is connecting the four different men onto the film’s larger focus of obsession and is able to “create intuitive forms of order out of chaos itself—much like the experience one has when watching the slowly evolving cohesion of the disparate stories of *Fast, Cheap, & Out of Control...*” (Chang 70-71). As the film progresses the viewer is allowed to experience this collective visual interpretation of obsession and see what it is like to be inside the mind of these four individuals (Chang 70-71). In *Mama D’s 2 Blocks* the viewer is provided a sense of the disorientating nature of the Katrina experience.

Morris does not make his films for the passive viewer. By including footage projected on a monitor and then re-shot, or over-exposing highlights on a gardener as he chops in slow-motion during a rainstorm, Morris makes the

viewer expand their mind to see something in a new way. The images in Morris's films have more power because interpretation is required to understand exactly what is being seen. In *Fast, Cheap and Out of Control* Morris, with the help of cinematographer Robert Richardson, the film is not being literal, but is representing what the subject is experiencing. The film "create[s] a mental landscape that shows how the character sees the world" (Szuchman).

A focus on small details, normally overlooked as irrelevant, is another important stylistic element used often by Morris which has become part of his signature style. Morris has the ability to take what appears to be ordinary on the surface and uncover the surrealistic level which lies beneath. This is evident in *The Thin Blue Line* where "small details from the scene of the incident are invested with the hyperrealism of advertising photography..." (Lack 22). For instance, Morris focuses on the milk-shake falling to the ground and slowly oozing out of the cup to mark the importance of this event. It is something another director might have seen as unimportant, but Morris is hinting that the female officer was not following protocol, or perhaps not paying full attention, because she had the milk-shake in her hand. In *Fast, Cheap and Out of Control* visuals include microscopic cells dividing, close-ups of elephant feet, extreme close-ups of the mole rats, and the small clippings flying off topiary animals as they are trimmed. Another consequence of the attention to these types of details is that the viewer is put closer to the scene than they would be able to be in reality. The viewer is witness to the details that would probably be lost in the

sub-conscious of a normal person, but to the 'obsessed' character they are an important part of the experience.

Turning to another filmmaker's work, the editing style utilized in the film *Listen Up, The Lives of Quincy Jones*, while disorienting at times, creates a sense of experiencing a dreamlike state or recollecting a bad memory. Director Ellen Weissbrod rapidly intercuts the participant's interviews to create a musical quality to the words and allows the film to be modeled after the creative vision of Quincy Jones. One scene in particular serves as an example of the impressionistic style that is attempted throughout *Mama D's 2 Blocks*. The scene centers on a discussion of a childhood memory recalled by Quincy Jones. The camera tracks up the stairs to an open window with the curtain blowing in the wind. A rapid succession of jump cuts on the window accompany Jones describing his feelings of abandonment. The rapid pace of editing and aural repetition are techniques also used in *Mama D's 2 Blocks* and are effective tools to create a sense of urgency, tension and disarray.

Spike Lee's film, *When the Levees Broke*, provides an all encompassing portrait of the Katrina story. The film is over four hours in length and has been described as "astonishing in its scope and acuity" (Sicinski, 55). The film fully details the vast majority of the major events of the Katrina experience and also offers reflections into New Orleans's historical vulnerability in terms of the physical landscape and economic situation. One possible rationale for the exclusion of Mama D's story is that the film is designed to be viewed "as [a] antimonument, a refusal to allow revisionism and bureaucratic self congratulation

to put a happy face on tragedy by turning the spotlight on individual acts of heroism and can-do attitude—the typical building blocks of the unctuous bourgeois myth” (55). While there are moments of heroism in Lee’s film, presented minimally, the film is more focused on holding all involved accountable for the consistent ineffectiveness during the disaster. While on location for *Mama D’s 2 Blocks*, Mama D stated to the production staff that she heard Spike Lee was looking for her and that he must not be looking hard enough because she lives on Dourgenois street. It is clear Lee could have spoken with anyone he wanted and the decision not to present Mama D’s perspective must have been deliberate given that the film was so effective in securing interviews with so many of the main people involved with Katrina from ordinary citizens to local and national politicians.

The film is largely made up of traditional interviews, but there are moments of poetical exploration by the filmmaker. The end credits display each interviewee physically holding a frame and stating their name thus evoking a sense that the film is a portrait of their experience. Earlier the film contains a poet reading a rhythmically charged poem about the events, but there are also more cinematic experimentations. For instance at the end of the second hour the film is made up of long, slow-moving tracking shots through the devastated ninth ward accompanied by a haunting musical score. This device is reminiscent of the tracking shots used to capture the horrors of the holocaust in Alan Resnais’ *Night and Fog* and provides the viewer with time to fully comprehend the extreme levels of devastation. *When the Levees Broke* is an important work

demonstrating the relevance of films documenting the Katrina experience and will always be an important part of the historical record surrounding Katrina's impact on New Orleans and the country.

Other films offer a more micro-level examination into a particular situation from within the larger story of Katrina. This is the approach that most similarly resembles *Mama D's 2 Blocks* and the documentaries offer important guidance about how Katrina can be covered by the documentary medium. Laslo Fulop and Wickes Helmboldt's *Tim's Island* offers a fascinating chronicle of a group of well-equipped New Orleans residents who decided to remain during the Hurricane and then became trapped by the flooding. The documentary is important because it documents the experience of those trapped by the floodwater. From the realization that the water was actually rising after Katrina had passed, to the extensive amount of footage of the flooded streets, the film provides a real sense of surviving through the dire conditions. The film is shot from the perspective of the participants and the two directors appear in scenes themselves when not behind the camera. At the beginning of the film the participants appear jovial and it is absorbing to see their transformation into a real state of fear as the situation becomes progressively worse with each passing day. This film also offers unique footage of traveling through the water on boats where stranded people appear sitting on every porch and wading through the water begging for assistance. Also of note is that the film takes place in the Mid-City area of New Orleans which is adjacent to Mama D's neighborhood so the

water levels would have been similar and thus one can extrapolate that the scenery and conditions would have been similar for both groups.

After Katrina: Rebuilding St. Bernard Parish, directed by Adam Finberg, offers an assessment of the conditions faced in St. Bernard Parish which borders New Orleans. Throughout this film the interviewee's stories parallel those found in *Mama D's 2 Blocks*. The film validates the widespread anger over the destruction of the area and the lack of assistance to re-build. St Bernard's residency is typically classified as white and being from a low economic bracket. In this film there is the shared belief that class played the dominant role in the areas that were hardest hit. This belief is also shared by the interviewees in *Mama D's 2 Blocks*. The film ends with affirmation that people will return to St. Bernard. This resilient attitude among the residents is also featured in *Mama D's 2 Blocks*, although less enthusiastically, and seems to reflect accurately those residents who are able to make it back into both areas.

In *An Eye in the Storm*, director Neil Alexander offers viewers a look at what the streets were like during the storm and immediately after in the downtown area of the city. The videography within this documentary provides unforgettable images of vacant city streets which are normally filled with people. The film also provides poignant images of the flooded streets and the terrible conditions experienced by residents at the New Orleans convention center. This film stands out because of the tranquil mood created throughout the film, in the midst of the tragic imagery, through the inclusion of wide shots, held on-screen for long periods of time, with only audio of storm noise.

Alex Lemay's film, *Desert Bayou*, provides an examination of the evacuee experience by following a group of New Orleans residents on their journey to Utah. The film explores the displaced residents struggles with living in a community foreign to their own due to a radically different racial and cultural landscape. The film uses constant voice over narration, by a non-participant, and focuses more on the cultural shock experienced by the African-American group, and their sometimes questionable treatment. Throughout the film there are some interesting contentions raised which are shared by Mama D. For instance, this film does question whether the levees were bombed and the film touches upon the idea that the entire flooding was by design so that the wealthy real estate developers would be able to develop additional areas of New Orleans. This is a belief deeply held by Mama D and seems to be pervasive among the victims of Katrina. Finally, it is interesting to note that some of the former New Orleans residents decided to remain in Utah because it is viewed as a place with greater opportunities than New Orleans. This point stands in contrast with the 'return home' message presented in Mama D's 2 Blocks, but it is a valid view held by great deals of evacuees who have chosen not to come back to New Orleans and the poor economic opportunities which existed previously to Katrina.

Literature

The government itself formed a committee to try and attain an understanding of the errors made resulting in the Katrina disaster. There they concluded that "[t]here was more than enough failure to go around" and the final document produced released by the committee, entitled *A Failure of Initiative*,

demonstrates ineffectiveness “at all levels of government” (U.S. Congress, 359). Their conclusions note a general “lack of situational awareness” and the fact that many were “reactive, not proactive” (360-1). *A Failure of Initiative* is riddled with blame and mea culpas and is an important work documenting the minute details of the gross incompetence within the government and the media, as well calling for “more order, more urgency, more coordination, and more initiative” in response to future crises (362). The document is important to note because it validates the interviewee’s anger over the substandard relief efforts.

Mama D’s assertions that race is an ongoing factor in the lack of adequate assistance is abundantly documented by researchers who show that, in a 1995 study on assistance after Hurricane Hugo, “a pattern of neglect emerged such that less educated and Black residents received proportionately less help than equally affected victims who were more educated or White” (Kaniasty and Norris, 33). The film ends with a call by the interviewees to return home, but throughout the film it is suggested that some residents are being forced out in order to provide new areas of development. This is supported by many including writer John White who notes that “[d]espite the desperate need for citizens, there is a glee with which some speak of taking advantage of the storm to rid the city of its poor” (46). Undoubtedly there will be the continual need to monitor the ongoing housing crisis within New Orleans and to look more closely into causes behind it.

PRODUCTION PHASE

Overview

Due to the immediacy of events following the flooding in the New Orleans area, the primary footage utilized in this film was captured while events were transpiring. The situation on the ground in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina was in a perpetual state of confusion and the conditions on the ground changed daily. Therefore, had the production been delayed the footage would have been inherently different. With each day gone by the situation became less dire and in order to capture the true significance of the lack of an expedient governmental response, the production was undertaken as quickly as possible. By shooting some footage only two and a half months after the event, the film captures a unique moment in history. There have been an abundance of films dealing with the actual days following the hurricane, but this film captures the moment when people began to get up and forge ahead with the process of rebuilding.

The production did not have what is often considered an ideal amount of time in order to acclimate to the tense, disoriented mentality of the residents of New Orleans. Barry Hampe, a documentary filmmaker and author, asserts that more time is needed on location in order to locate “the interesting, articulate, and necessary people who will appear on camera as well as the locations you’ll need to shoot in” (174). However, the advantage this production had was that everything witnessed was interesting and everyone was directly involved in one way or another. The only individuals at the location were either returning residents, residents who endured the flood, or volunteer workers. People were

eager to tell their stories and they were physically engaged in confronting the profound devastation and ongoing renewal efforts. Because of this we had “a high probability of observing the behavior you want to record” (46). The production involved three major shooting periods and during each period, highly usable interviews and supporting visual materials were obtained in a concise amount of time.

Schedule

The initial production phase of this project took place in New Orleans from November 12th through November the 16th of 2005. During the time spent on location the primary interviews were conducted and a significant amount of time was devoted to gathering observational footage of the daily action taking place at the center. The second major portion of production was undertaken in December of 2005 over the holiday break. This period included securing additional key interviews and the continuation of documenting the interactions at Mama D’s home, turned distribution center. The final production efforts happened in November of 2006 and involved getting updated information on Mama D’s situation and a current state of affairs report about Mama D’s neighborhood.

Crew

The production approached crew members who possessed technical proficiency and an ability to relate positively with others so they would be able to quickly establish a rapport with residents when only physically present for a brief time. The crew members were each chosen due to their proven ability to quickly meet and secure interview subjects in a non-offensive manner. This was a

deliberate effort to avoid a crewmember negatively influencing the participants because “the presence of anyone detached or disapproving will be felt personally, by you and especially by participants, who are highly attuned in this new, unfamiliar work you are asking them to do” (Rabiger, 257). The production crew had to act fast and the production would have seriously suffered from any setbacks caused by personality clashes.

The crew was comprised of Mika Ferris serving as producer and director, Jessica Schoenbachler on camera and Liz Daggett in the role of sound recordist and principle boom operator. The small nature of the crew was an essential asset in terms of being mobile and unobtrusive. Increased approachability was another positive result of utilizing a small crew. Because of the rapid nature of events and the fact that interviews were arranged spontaneously, each member of the crew took on multiple roles and the nature of the production work flowed from one role to another depending on the circumstances. After the initial contact with Mama D was made our presence was never questioned. We had been sanctioned by the ruling authority and we were then free to speak with anyone else we encountered.

During subsequent shoots an even more minimal set-up was utilized consisting of just myself. This was done for several reasons, including a lack of funds to hire local production staff, and a continued effort to appear inconspicuous. Going to the location without a large additional crew proved to create a more intimate atmosphere through which the interviews conducted were

of a more open and personal nature that would have not been feasible with a multiple person crew.

Equipment

Many different sources of footage were incorporated in the construction of *Mama D's 2 Blocks*. The main camera, used for the bulk of the production, was the JVC 5000. Additional footage was captured using Sony's PD-150, a smaller lightweight digital video camera. The PD-150 was continually used due to the fact that it allowed greater access to the subjects of the film. The smaller camera was found to be less intimidating and enabled a greater subject interaction in terms of openness towards being videotaped. Other essential equipment that was used during principal production, re-shoots and for pick-up shots included the Sennheiser boom microphone, Sennheiser wireless microphone and a Sony camera-mounted light.

During the primary shoot there was no electricity available on location. Mama D had a generator, but it was used to its maximum capacity and outside lighting gear was not considered a high priority. This was not a major concern for camera and sound because the production was supplied with ample battery supply for the equipment's operation. The lack of power did ultimately cause a change in operational procedures concerning lighting which may have been normally incorporated into the shoot. For all of the interviews available lighting was utilized instead of traditional lighting equipment that requires a significant amount of electrical power. The main source of available lighting used was natural sunlight, thus the majority of the interviewees were done during the

daylight hours. As the sun began to set we tried to offset the darkness with a portable battery powered light. This proved to be an effective lighting source and the same light was then used exclusively once the sun was gone. With the use of just the battery powered source, we were able to produce enough light level in order to record viewable footage when within a proximity of about five to six feet from a subject.

Budget

Mama D's 2 Blocks was extremely feasible due to extensive production and post-production resources made available as part of UNT's Master of Fine Arts program. Both production and post-production equipment were provided in-kind by the fees already paid for university tuition. In addition, all crew donated their time as part of a working relationship among participants in the MFA program whereby there is a reciprocal agreement to assist on each other's productions. Additional funding resources for this project were the result of grant requests and personal funds. Archival material of the flooding of New Orleans was secured, without financial obligation, through the United States Coast Guard via a Freedom of Information Act request made in 2006. The major expended funds were made in order to secure the use of Mama D's participation in the Congressional Hearing on the evacuee experience. There was also cost involved with obtaining the use of music and further funds will be needed for DVD duplication, press kits and festival entrance fees.

Releases

All release forms were secured on location and followed the principle of 'informed consent' defined by Rabiger as "[w]hen someone consents to film knowing all the circumstances of risk to themselves..." (94). Every attempt was made to detail the nature of this production and where it potentially may be seen so that there was full disclosure made to every resident who was willing to participate with the production. The majority of the music incorporated into the film was supplied by Network Music and its inclusion in the film is allowed based on a copyright agreement with the RTVF department. Some additional music was produced by New Orleans musician Matt Johnson as a work for hire in which the copyright was transferred to the producer of the film. A license agreement was undertaken with C-SPAN for the right to include the footage of Mama D at the congressional hearings in Washington. The amount of \$1500 was paid to C-Span for the use of the footage and provides the producer with the right to show the film, including the portion from C-SPAN, in festivals and non-commercial venues.

POST-PRODUCTION

Schedule

Post-production began immediately following production in November of 2005. All footage was duplicated for security and then transferred from digital videotape into digital files for use with non-linear editing software. All footage was transferred into the computer by the fall of 2006. From September 2006 through December 2006 the video material was surveyed and logs were generated, highlighting the best material to be incorporated into a string-out edit which is a rough version of the best material put together in order of subject matter.

An initial rough-cut, or preliminary version, of the documentary was successfully completed by February of 2007. This allowed the strongest material to be critiqued and illuminated any areas where further clarification was required. The editing process continued through March of 2007 and the material was re-shaped into a fine cut, or potentially finished version, for final review by the thesis committee. Technical modification of the original footage became necessary in both the visual and aural components. Advanced color correction and audio processing were undertaken for over a week in order to smooth out the video and audio tracks. Music and minimal sound effects were then added to create audio on both a realistic and emotional level. During the audio mix-down over eight separate audio tracks were conformed into a stereo master for the completed version. After final suggestions were implemented into the final version a series

of additional technical revisions were made and the completed film was approved in March of 2007.

Equipment

This project was edited using Apple's non-linear software, Final Cut Pro. The project was completed using an Apple G-5 desktop computer with over 200 gigabytes of storage on an external firewire hard drive. With this level of storage capacity, all material was able to be safely stored and logged within the editing system, allowing the editor immediate access any video footage relevant to a particular section of the documentary. Final Cut Pro allowed a continually efficient workflow environment and proficient levels of post-production supervision needed to edit the film and track the location of all pertinent materials.

Reconceptualization During Post

The editing of *Mama D's 2 Blocks* was approached maintaining the belief that the edit phase of a documentary is "central to the success of a documentary, both technically and creatively" (Rabiger, 408). During the post-production phase of the project serious changes were made to the initial design of the production. Given the emphasis on community re-building, more characters were featured than originally envisioned. Prior to the editing phase, Mama D and her reflection of events was the major area of focus, with supportive statements presented by neighbors and participants of the local rehabilitation effort. Also Mama D's contention that the levee's were bombed proved to be a distraction from the major focus of the film. Audience feedback indicated that the bombing reference

was not fully supported within the documentary itself. Rather than take the film in the direction of a lengthy supportive episode the statements were eliminated. In an effort to better crystallize the strong undertakings of the entire community, additional observations from supporting characters were incorporated. This allowed an accommodation of the research presented that stressed the importance of volunteer workers and the entire community coming together. Another significant area where the film was re-tooled during the editing process involved direct changes to the footage itself. Footage was accelerated, slowed and visually manipulated in an effort to provide visual resources capable of recreating the sense of destruction and confusion experienced by the interviewees.

EVALUATION OF COMPLETED WORK

Production

The production portion of this project was executed extremely well. This assessment is based on the criteria put forth by documentary filmmaker Michael Rabiger in his “Production Project Assessment Criteria” used in the evaluation of the text’s exercises (539-61). There are a variety of questions posed by Rabiger that cover many facets of documentary production. Three of the most relevant areas used in assessing the production of *Mama D’s 2 Blocks* include evaluating the mood of the film, the representation of the location and the overall impact of the film (545). These three topics cover broad areas of filmmaking and the evaluation of the answers, in regards to *Mama D’s 2 Blocks*, provide a complete summary as to the accomplishment of the production.

The mood that is created in *Mama D’s 2 Blocks* is overall ominous highlighted by moments of resilience. The film’s ability to establish “a strong mood” is seen in the overall emotional complexity revealed from the variety of different interviewees (545). Hearing the survival stories and the anger felt over the failed relief efforts, the final film becomes a cathartic experience for both the audience and the participants. The audience is provided with an experiential sense of what it was like to have taken part in the Katrina evacuation and the vast efforts required during rebuilding.

By asking if the “[l]ocation’s geography is well shown”, the assessment of *Mama D’s 2 Blocks* is further proven to be successful (545). Overhead footage of the flooding portrays the endless extent to which an entire city was affected.

The lingering devastation is further depicted as the film moves through neighborhood streets filled with debris. Mama D's distribution center is displayed in detail and numerous scenes of reconstruction are shown in order to present a complete picture of the surroundings.

Finally, it can be shown that the film "has impact" and "makes a statement" (545). *Mama D's 2 Blocks* directly addresses the failed governmental response to Katrina. The film's point of view consistently criticizes the governmental organizations for their inept attempts at aid and reveals the powerful anger building in New Orleans residents who are concerned over the perceived reasons for the lack of adequate support. The audience is left with a series of impressions about what the participants went through and the struggles they continue to face.

Mama D's 2 Blocks also maintains a high level of accomplishment due the extraordinary amount of footage successfully obtained in a short period of time. Because of the travel time involved the production was not able to return to the location except for a few selective periods. Despite the lack of physically being on location for an extended length of time quality interviews were conducted and well shot accompanying visual documentation of the events was acquired. The one area where further research and study is warranted stems from the amount of time spent physically on location. A future area of interest would be to observe Mama D's interactions with the community for an extended amount of time. This would possibly allow the audience to see events transpire in real time in addition to being only reflected upon in a more traditional documentary interview situation.

Post-Production

In terms of editing, Rabiger's 'assessment criteria' can also be illustrative of a successful post-production operation. In addition to a technical assessment of the final version of a film, Rabiger repeatedly asks if the "[f]ilm transcends limitations of the project to say something original?" (539-61). *Mama D's 2 Blocks* goes beyond merely demonstrating the manual efforts involved in the reconstruction to relate the emotional journey of the interviewees. Editing this film was an intense creative and labor intensive process that resulted in an elaborate portrait of a neighborhood beginning to rebuild led by the remarkable efforts of Mama D.

Self-Critique

As I continue to learn from every filmmaking experience and to expand my knowledge of the craft of storytelling, I can say that the making of *Mama D's 2 Blocks* has provided me with important guidance for future projects. The single biggest problem encountered in the making of this film was the spatial separation between Mama D's location and that of the crew. By not being able to go to the physical location in order to obtain additional footage, the film had to be put together using footage gathered in a succinct period of time. Despite our best efforts to cover the events taking place at Mama D's home, there were areas where additional shooting would have better supported the statements made in the film. In particular, seeing a restoration project from start to finish could have been helpful in relaying to the audience the tremendous amount of work being done by the volunteers. While what we did gather during the three shooting

periods was sufficient, I feel that when producing future projects I will make every effort to allow the crew to be on location for a longer period of time so that there is enough time to gauge the rhythm of the events and to witness the completion of the actions referenced by the participants.

With regards to technical issues the biggest problem encountered involved the sound quality on some of the interviews. Because many of the participants were not in New Orleans on a regular basis and we were only on location for limited amounts of time, we risked being unable to speak with many of the interviewees if not conducted immediately. Therefore we decided it was more important to conduct the interview while we could and occasionally began an interview with inadequate set-up time. As a result the sound was frequently overmodulated, or distorted, and this required serious effort and time to correct using the audio editing software Soundtrack Pro. In the final film distortion is minimized, but the exhausting physical process of correcting audio issues is something I hope to avoid on subsequent productions by placing more emphasis on audio quality while on location.

What I have taken from the experience of making this film is the importance of not being overwhelmed by the serious nature of the events unfolding during production. By this I mean one must remain at a distance and focus on the technical nature of the filmmaking process despite the emotional nature of the circumstances. I needed to think about the details of what would be required in the editing room, not just how important the subject matter appeared to be at the time. Without technically acceptable footage and clear visually

supportive images I potentially risked not being able to tell the complete story that I witnessed.

Conclusion

Mama D's 2 Blocks was successful in integrating the theories, put forth earlier by disaster research. The film serves as a visual illustration of a community's response to a disaster. Typical of reactions seen in other disasters, the film is an important work portraying neighbors coming together in order to deal with both physical and emotional trauma. In terms of assessing the film's inclusion of Nichols' poetic mode, the final film was able to effectively use poetic stylistic techniques to represent the interviewee experience by "sacrifice[ing] the conventions of continuity editing and the sense of a very specific location in time..." (Nichols, 102). The film experiments with "temporal rhythms and spatial juxtapositions" in an effort to both impart information about what happened, and effectively chronicle the evolving "mood" and psychological state of the residents (102-3).

APPENDIX
BUDGET

Full Budget

Total Above-The-Line	0
Total Below-The-Line	6257
Contingency @ 10%	625
Grand Total	6882

ABOVE-THE-LINE

	Amount	Units	x	Rate	Sub-Total	In-Kind	Total
03-00 Producer/Director							
03-01 Producer/Director							
Pre-Production	8 Weeks	1		1750	14000	14000	0
Production	2 Weeks	1		1750	3500	3500	0
Edit	8 Weeks	1		1750	14000	14000	0
					Total for 03-00		0

BELOW-THE-LINE

04-00 Production Staff							
04-01 Production Assistant	20 Days	1		150	3000	3000	0
					Total for 04-00		0

05-00 Camera							
05-01 Videographer	10 Days	1		300	3000	3000	0
05-02 Camera Package	10 Days	1		350	3500	3500	0
05-03 Lighting Package	5 Days	1		150	750	750	0
05-03 Tape Stock	10 Days	4		4	160	0	160
05-04 Expendables	1 Allow	1		150	150	0	150
					Total for 05-00		310

06-00 Sound							
06-01 Location Recordist	10 Days	1		250	2500	2500	0
06-02 Sound Package	10 Days	1		175	1750	1750	0
06-03 Expendables	1 Allow	1		150	150	0	150
					Total for 06-00		150

07-00 Location Cost							
07-01 Gas	1 Allow	1		500	500	0	500
07-02 Transportation	0 Miles	0.4		0	0	0	0
07-03 Meals	10 Days	3	50 p/day		1500	500	1000
07-04 Accommodations	10 Days	1	rm	1000	3000	3000	0
					Total for 07-00		1500

Total Above-The-Line	0
Total Below-The-Line	6257
Contingency @ 10%	625

Grand Total	6882
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08-00 Editorial

08-01 Off-Line Editor	40 Days	1	250	10000	10000	0
08-02 Off-Line System						
Non-Linear	40 Days	1	200	8000	8000	0
08-03 On-Line W/Editor						
Final Cut	8 Hours	1	150	1200	1200	0
08-04 Video Dubs						
Archival Dub	1 Allow	1	100	100	0	100
Misc Archive Dub	1 Allow	1	150	150	0	150
08-05 Screening Tapes-DVD	25 Discs	1	0.4	10	0	10
08-07 Logging/Transcription	25 Tapes	1	100	2500	2500	0
08-06 Video Masters						
Digi-Beta-30:00	1 Tapes	1	18	18	0	18
Digi-Beta-Transfer	1 Allow	1	150	150	0	150
08-07 Closed Captioning	0 Allow	0	0	0	0	0
08-08 DVD Mastering	20 Hours	1	40	800	800	0
				Total for 08-00		428

09-00 Music

09-01 Composer W/Musicians	1 Allow	1	250	250	0	250
				Total for 09-00		250

10-00 Post Production Sound

10-02 Laydown	1 Hours	1	175	175	175	0
10-03 Pre-Lay	8 Hours	1	150	1200	1200	0
10-04 Mix/Sweetening	6 Hours	1	150	900	900	0
10-05 Layback	0.5 Hours	1	175	87.5	87.5	0
10-06 Stock/Dubs	1 Allow	1	150	150	0	150
				Total for 10-00		150

11-00 Archival/Stock Footage

11-01 Film/Video Licensing	1 Allow	1	1250	1250	0	1250
				Total for 11-00		1250

12-00 Administrative Expenses

12-01 Copies	1 Allow	1	50	50	0	50
12-02 Postage/Shipping	1 Allow	1	100	100	0	100
12-03 Telephone/Cell	1 Allow	1	300	300	300	0
12-04 Printing	1 Allow	1	175	175	175	0
12-05 Production Insurance	0 Allow	0	0	0	0	0
12-06 Equipment Insurance	0 Allow	0	0	0	0	0
12-07 Copyright Fees	0 Allow	0	0	0	0	0
				Total for 12-00		150

Total Above-The-Line	0
Total Below-The-Line	6257
Contingency @ 10%	625

Grand Total	6882
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13-00 Distribution/Outreach

13-01 Production Stills	25 Prints	1	1.75	43.75	0	44
13-02 Materials/Posters/Flyers	0 Allow	0	0	0	0	0
13-03 Festival Entrance Fees	20 Each	1	40	800	0	800
13-04 Press Kits	25 Each	1	9	225	0	225
13-05 DVD Duplication	300 Allow	1	1000	1000	0	1000

Total for 13-00	2069
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TOTAL	6257
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Contingency @ 10%	625
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GRAND TOTAL	6882
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Total Above-The-Line	0
Total Below-The-Line	6882
Total Above and Below-The-Line	6882

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